

# Historical Records in the Golden State

A Strategic Plan for Preserving California's Documentary Heritage

Funding provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission

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On the cover: Mt. Lassen viewed from Lake Manzanita. Photo courtesy California State Archives

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# Introduction

#### **Historical Records Environment**

Never before have California's historical record-keepers faced so many challenges. Support from administrators, both in public and private organizations, is tepid and tenuous. This lack of adequate resources has led to overall poor management in the state's estimated 4,000 repositories. Although California can boast of some of the largest and best collections of historical materials in the country, the great majority of repositories offer poor access to their holdings, have inadequate space and environmental conditions, and poorly trained staff. Legislation relating to public records is woefully outdated. Most discouragingly, little progress can be discerned in the past twenty years. Despite the establishment of the Western Archives Institute, the building of a new state archives facility, and the passage of legislation for gubernatorial records, the large picture is gloomy and foreboding. Moreover, the advent of new technologies, in particular, the emergence of electronic records, has seriously stretched the already meager funding available to the archival, library, and historical communities. Without a significant increase in resources, California's documentary legacy, already in jeopardy, will continue to deteriorate.

Equally important, it is essential that the California Historical Records Advisory Board (CHRAB) and the California State Archives begin to exercise true leadership roles for the state's historical records constituency. To date, CHRAB has acted only as a reviewer of grant applications and not as a coordinator for historical records activities, as conceived and authorized by federal regulations. The State Archives, while it has done much for the archival community over the years beyond its statutory mandate to manage the enduring records of state government, could do more. Given its size and budget relative to other institutions, the State Archives has the potential to advocate and lead on behalf of other repositories.

Other organizations must also do their share to promote this strategic plan. Without assertive and informed support from the Society of California Archivists, the California Council for the Promotion of History, the California Library Association, the California Association of Museums, the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties, regional chapters of the Association of Record Managers and Administrators, and many other organizations, real change and progress in the preservation of California's documentary heritage will not be achieved.

#### California Historical Records Statewide Planning Project

In 1999, the California Historical Records Advisory Board received funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHRPC) to conduct a twenty-one month project to determine the status of historical records throughout the state. To carry out its work, CHRAB engaged the services of Dr. Gabriele Carey of History Associates Incorporated to prepare two reports: one focused on state government records, particularly

the programs of the California State Archives; the other aimed at records maintained by local governments and historical records repositories.

The consultant obtained information from a number of sources. Comprehensive discussions were held with California State Archives staff and representatives of the California Department of General Services-Records Management Program, California State Library, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Golden State Museum. Survey forms were developed and disseminated to every incorporated city and county and over 800 records repositories. Responses were received from 215 cities and thirty-five counties as well as 244 repositories. In addition, eight town hall meetings were conducted throughout the state to learn firsthand about the needs and issues for local government and historical record-keepers. Using information gleaned from the surveys and town hall meetings, Dr. Carey crafted a thorough assessment of historical record concerns and developed a list of recommendations for consideration by CHRAB. In turn, CHRAB used the consultant reports as the foundation for its strategic planning work.

The full text of the two reports and an executive summary may be found at www.ss.ca.gov/archives/level3\_shrab.html.

#### California Historical Records Advisory Board

The California Historical Records Advisory Board was established in 1976 in response to federal regulations that require each state to have an historical records board in order to participate in the grant funding program of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. As the central advisory body for historical records in California, CHRAB is authorized to carry out statewide planning and assessment activities, act as a coordinator to facilitate cooperation among historical record-keepers within the state, and serve as a state-level reviewer of NHPRC grant applications. To date, sixty-five California projects have received over 3.8 million dollars from the NHPRC records program.

The CHRAB is composed of a state coordinator, appointed by the Governor, a deputy coordinator, and twelve additional members. Representatives from the State Senate, State Assembly, California State Library, University of California, California State University, and California Department of Parks and Recreation serve on the board. The balance of the membership is appointed by the Governor with one gubernatorial position dedicated to a representative of the Native American community. A majority of the members must have demonstrated experience or interest in the collection, administration, and use of historical records.

#### **Mission Statement**

The California Historical Records Advisory Board is dedicated to promoting, coordinating, and supporting efforts to identify, manage, and preserve the historical records of California. In carrying forward this mission, the Board advocates professional stewardship and cooperation in the record-keeping community in order to ensure ready access to and use of the state's documentary heritage.

# Developing a Long Range Plan: Issues and Objectives

The California Historical Records Advisory Board has identified ten key issues for the historical records community to consider. Under each section is a list of objectives that will need to be implemented if real progress is to be achieved and an identification of organizations that will need to be involved with each objective. This planning effort was aided by a thorough review of similar activities conducted in other states and by reference to work carried out by other organizations in California.

All quotes in the plan are taken from the consultant reports. All photos are from the collections of the California State Archives.

### **Issue 1: Resources for Record-Keepers**

Lack of adequate resources for archives and records management is a defining characteristic of the California historical records landscape. In many ways, the problem of insufficient resources cuts across all other issues. Public and private record-keepers not only suffer from small budgets, but also from a lack of basic information and training opportunities.

### **Objectives**

1. Establish a clearinghouse of information on archives and records management. The clearinghouse would include documentation on professional standards, best practices, and models, and would be widely available to record-keepers.

CSA, SCA, ARMA

Abbreviations of Organizations	
CSA	California State Archives
CSL	California State Library
SCA	Society of California
	Archivists
<b>CCPH</b>	California Council for the
	Promotion of History
ARMA	Association of Records
	Managers and
	Administrators-CA chapters
CAM	California Association of
	Museums
CLA	California Library
	Association
CCHS	<b>Conference of California</b>
	<b>Historical Societies</b>
CPTF	<b>California Preservation Task</b>
	Force
LCC	<b>League of California Cities</b>
CSAC	California State Association
	of Counties
<b>CHRAB</b>	California Historical
	Records Advisory Board
	•

- 2. Apply for funding from NHPRC to create a regrant program. The regrant funds would be distributed to those repositories demonstrating the greatest need in the management and preservation of their historical records, and would be in keeping with CHRAB's funding priorities. **CHRAB**
- 3. Establish a formal consulting service. This service would be available to repositories at nominal cost and would include the basic elements of archives and records management. CSA. SCA. ARMA

4. Update and republish the 1982 California State Archives manual, *Identification of the Historical Records of County Government in California*. The manual would be available in both printed and electronic formats.

### **Issue 2: Public Understanding and Awareness**

Record-keepers have limited recognition from the general public and within their own organizations. Effective records programs are often not regarded as being important or even necessary. As a result, records programs receive a low priority and wage an uphill battle for resources. To date, the historical records community has done a poor job in seeking opportunities to promote archival programs.

#### **Objectives**

- 1. Collect, share, and distribute information regarding the value of archives and records management. In particular, this information should be directed to resource allocators and government officials who control funding for records programs. *CSA*, *CCPH*, *SCA*, *ARMA*, *CAM*, *CLA*, *all repositories*
- 2. Establish an annual statewide Archives Week to focus public attention on the importance of historical records. *CSA*, *SCA*

# **Issue 3: Preservation of Records**

The preservation of historical records continues to be a serious problem for both public and private repositories. Fundamental is the lack of current information and education for those who care for records. At the state level, concrete steps must be taken to reorganize and reinvigorate preservation efforts.



Canning peaches, San Joaquin Valley, ca. 1920s

#### **Objectives**

1. Provide guidelines relating to the preservation and storage of historical records. This information would be available in both printed and electronic formats. *CSA*, *SCA*, *CSL*, *CPTF* 

- Establish a technical services program within the California State Archives. This program would merge the current preservation and microfilming programs and would be headed by a preservation officer or curator. CSA
- 3. Investigate the creation of a fee-based preservation service that could offer basic preservation advice and services to the historical records community. *CSA*
- 4. Work closely with the Executive Office of the Secretary of State to improve overall security at the California State Archives. *CSA*
- 5. Hire additional staff for preservation and microfilming activities at the California State Archives. *CSA*
- 6. Create an isolation receiving area at the California State Archives to house potentially contaminated records prior to their accessioning, and develop procedures to inspect, assess, and decontaminate records as necessary.

  CSA
- 7. Support the passage of legislation that would require state government records to be printed on acid-free paper stock. *CSL*, *CSA*, *SCA*, *CHRAB*

#### **Issue 4: Access to Information**

More than ever, users of historical records expect, even demand, ready access to information. Whether by traditional printed formats or digital copies available via the world wide web, the need to enhance access is paramount. Balancing this desire is the need to preserve collections for future generations.

#### **Objectives**

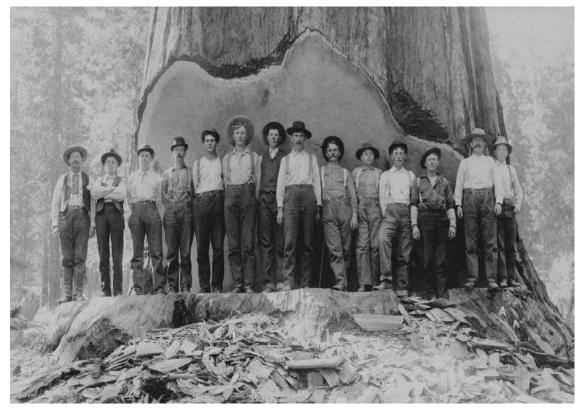
1. Promote legislation to revise the California Public Records Act. A revised act would include a seventy-five year limit on restrictions for records exempt under the law, would encompass records created by cities, counties and other local government entities, and would specifically include electronic records,

"In short,
California's
public
records are
in
jeopardy."

and electronic mail. CHRAB, CSA, SCA, CCPH, ARMA, LCC, CSAC, historical records community

- 2. Reduce the backlog of unprocessed state government records at the California State Archives. In doing this, the State Archives will explore new processing methodologies and direct greater resources to the processing program.

  CSA
- 3. Develop a strategy for supporting the conversion of historical records in smaller repositories to EAD format for inclusion in the Online Archive of California. *SCA*, *CSA*, *CSA*, *CSL*, *Online Archive of California*



Logging in the Sierra, ca. 1890s

## **Issue 5: Education and Training**

California's record-keepers are in urgent need for education and training about archives and records management. In particular, city and county officials desire training about creating and maintaining records retention schedules. Working together, the historical records community has the resources available to provide this needed assistance.

#### **Objectives**

- 1. Reactivate the SCA Basic Archives Workshop program. *SCA*
- 2. Develop workshops and training for records management, preservation, and appraisal for local governments. *CSA*, *ARMA*, *LCC*, *CSAC*
- 3. Continue to promote the Western Archives Institute, including expansion of WAI for targeted constituencies. *SCA*, *CSA*

"Currently,
the
California
Public
Records Act
has a
number of
weaknesses."

# **Issue 6: Adequacy of Documentation**

Although California is rich in the number and diversity of its collections, work is overdue in identifying subjects and communities under-represented in the historical record. Ensuring an adequate and accurate documentation of the state's history, in all its forms, is a crucial part of long-term planning.

#### **Objectives**

1. Establish a task force to identify under-documented topics in California history and develop a strategy for preserving information about and encouraging research on these topics.

CCPH, CSA, CSL, SCA, CHRAB, CCHS, selected repositories, selected historians and subject area specialists

- Work closely with the Records Management Program of the California Department of General Services to identify historical records within state government at the point of creation. CSA
- 3. Review the focus of and priorities for the State Government Oral History Program. *CSA*, cooperating oral history institutions
- Implement the recommendations of the California State Archives Appraisal Task Force for state government records. CSA
- 5. Convene a California Records Congress, composed of key organizations, individuals, and constituencies, to discuss this issue. *CHRAB*

#### **Issue 7: Electronic Records**

No challenge is greater today than the need to develop programs, create standards, and train staff for the management of electronic records. Quite simply, the problems for the record-keeper related to data migration, digitization, electronic mail, and online services did not exist twenty years ago. Archivists, government officials, and the private sector must work together to meet this challenge, which almost certainly will increase in the years ahead.



Japanese residents of Los Angeles County board a bus for a relocation center, 1942.

#### **Objectives**

1. Establish an intergovernmental task force for electronic records. The task force would focus on developing a strategy to manage and preserve information in electronic formats. CSA, California Department of Information Technology, California Department of General Services, LCC, CSAC, ARMA, selected organizations

- 2. Work with cities and counties to ensure that electronic records receive quality assurance assessment, that records management programs include electronic mail, and that the latest data migration techniques are understood and implemented when appropriate. *CSA*, *ARMA*, *LCC*, *CSAC*
- 3. Establish standards for the management of electronic records. California Department of General Services, *CSA*

"If the goal is to preserve a permanent record . . . digitization is not the appropriate choice."

### **Issue 8: Records Management**

Essential to the long-term welfare of archival work in the public sector is the proper establishment and maintenance of a records management program based on professional standards and procedures. Too often, however, records managers struggle for support. Moreover, many of California's cities and counties have not yet taken even the first steps in developing a program for their active records. It is imperative that the historical records community take immediate action to promote sound records management practices.

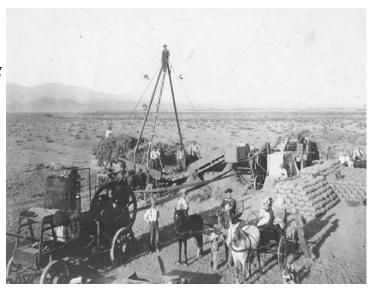
#### **Objectives**

- 1. Develop a model presentation and package of information about the business and legal benefits of a records management program for use by local governments. *CSA*, *ARMA*
- 2. Create model records retention guidelines for local governments and disseminate this information through printed and electronic formats. *CSA*
- 3. Support the passage of legislation that requires the establishment of a records management program for cities and counties. The program will include the creation of records retention schedules and the identification of vital and historical records. *CHRAB*, *CSA*, *LCC*, *CSAC*, *ARMA*

"In some cases, flagged records are destroyed by agencies rather than being transferred to the Archives."

# **Issue 9: Collaboration among Organizations**

It is often difficult and overwhelming for record-keepers to manage and preserve their historical collections working in isolation from others. Many challenges can be overcome or at least ameliorated by coordinating efforts with the broader records community. CHRAB encourages organizations throughout the state to think in creative ways to pool resources, share information, and jointly face common problems.



Harvest time near Santa Ana, Orange County, 1915

#### **Objectives**

- Encourage the creation of regional forums for the discussion of common concerns relating to archives and records management. SCA, CSA, CHRAB
- 2. Support grant projects and other mechanisms that seek to provide assistance to record-keepers through a sharing of professional staff, collective purchase and distribution of preservation supplies, and adequate facilities for the management of historical records. *CHRAB*, *CSA*, *CCPH*, *CSA*
- 3. Work closely with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the California State Library to cooperate in the management, preservation, and exhibition of historical materials within state government. *CSA*, *CHRAB*

## Issue 10: Leadership for the Historical Records Community

Underscoring this strategic plan is the intent of CHRAB to take on the role as the coordinator for historical records concerns in California. Equally important, CHRAB encourages the California State Archives to offer expanded services to the records community. Without a concerted effort to create an assertive leadership structure, the archival, library, and historical constituencies will struggle to improve their management of the state's documentary heritage.

**Objectives** 

- Reorganize CHRAB to become the coordinator for historical records activities statewide. In doing this, CHRAB should evaluate its relationship to the California Heritage Preservation Commission. CHRAB
- 2. Revive the County Historical Records Commissions by revising existing legislation to provide authority for the commissions to act as an advocate for local government records within each county. For examples, see issues 8 and 9. *CHRAB, CSA, CSAC*

"Without these collections, the history of California's peoples, places, and events could not be written or understood."



San Francisco after the great earthquake and fire, April 1906

# Funding Priorities

To assist California's record-keepers in seeking external funding, CHRAB has developed the following list of funding priorities. This list should receive the applicant's attention whether funding is requested directly through the National Historical Publications and Records Commission or via a future CHRAB regrant program. In particular, CHRAB encourages the historical records community to develop collaborative and innovative approaches to addressing the issues identified in the strategic plan.

# **Priority One**

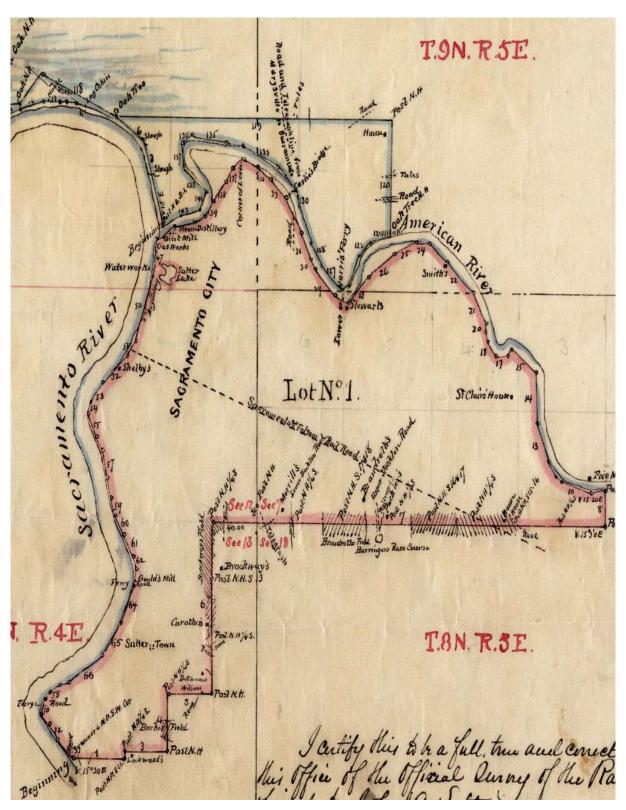
- 1. Improving preservation of and access to historical records of all types
- 2. Educating and training staff to manage historical collections to professional standards

# **Priority Two**

- 3. Increasing awareness of the significance of archives and records programs
- 4. Promoting collaborative efforts within the historical records community
- 5. Developing effective programs for the management and preservation of electronic records



Native American woman Yosemite Valley, ca. 1930s



A section of the Neuva Helvetia land grant of John Sutter, showing the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers.

# California Historical Records Advisory Board

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